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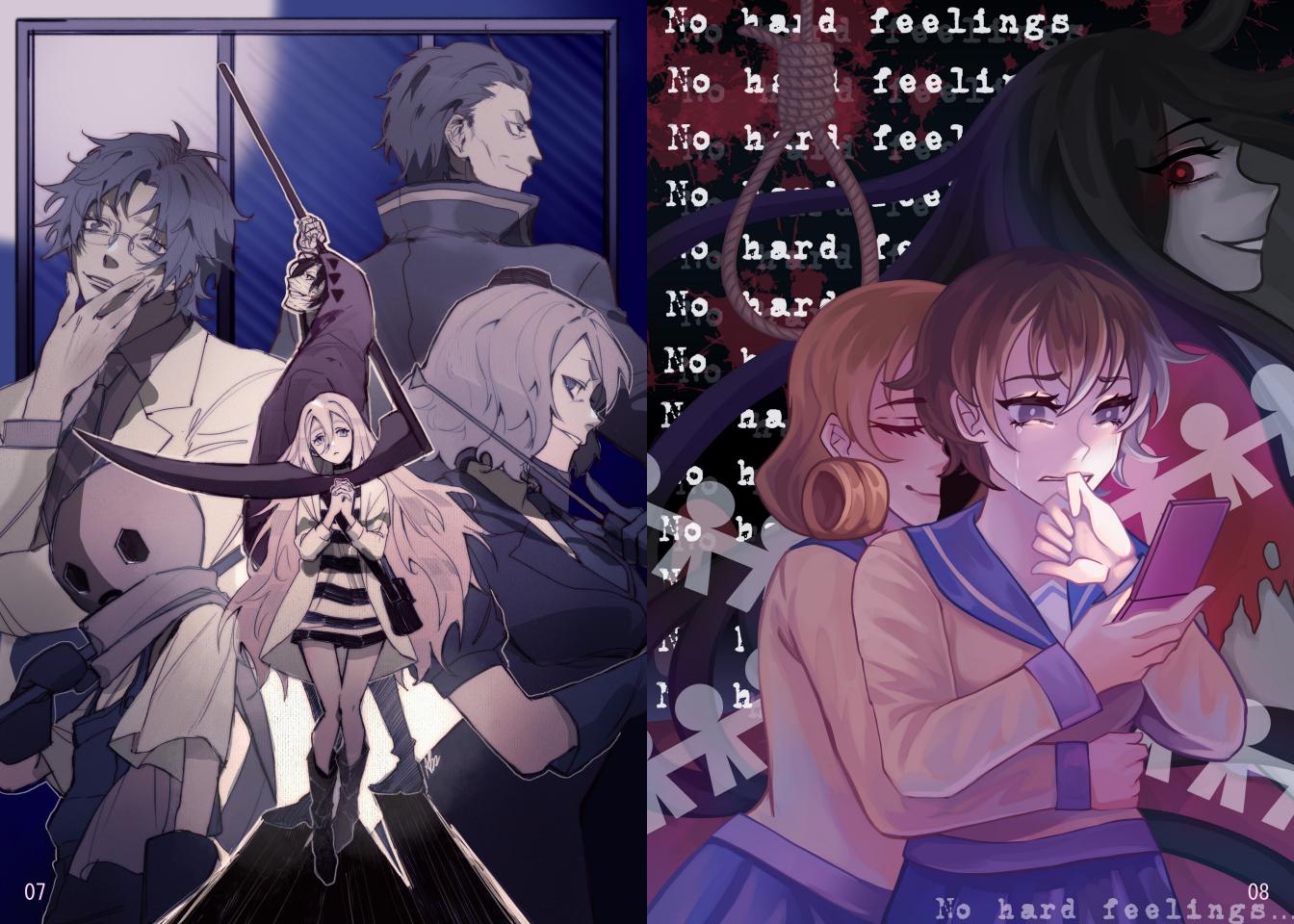
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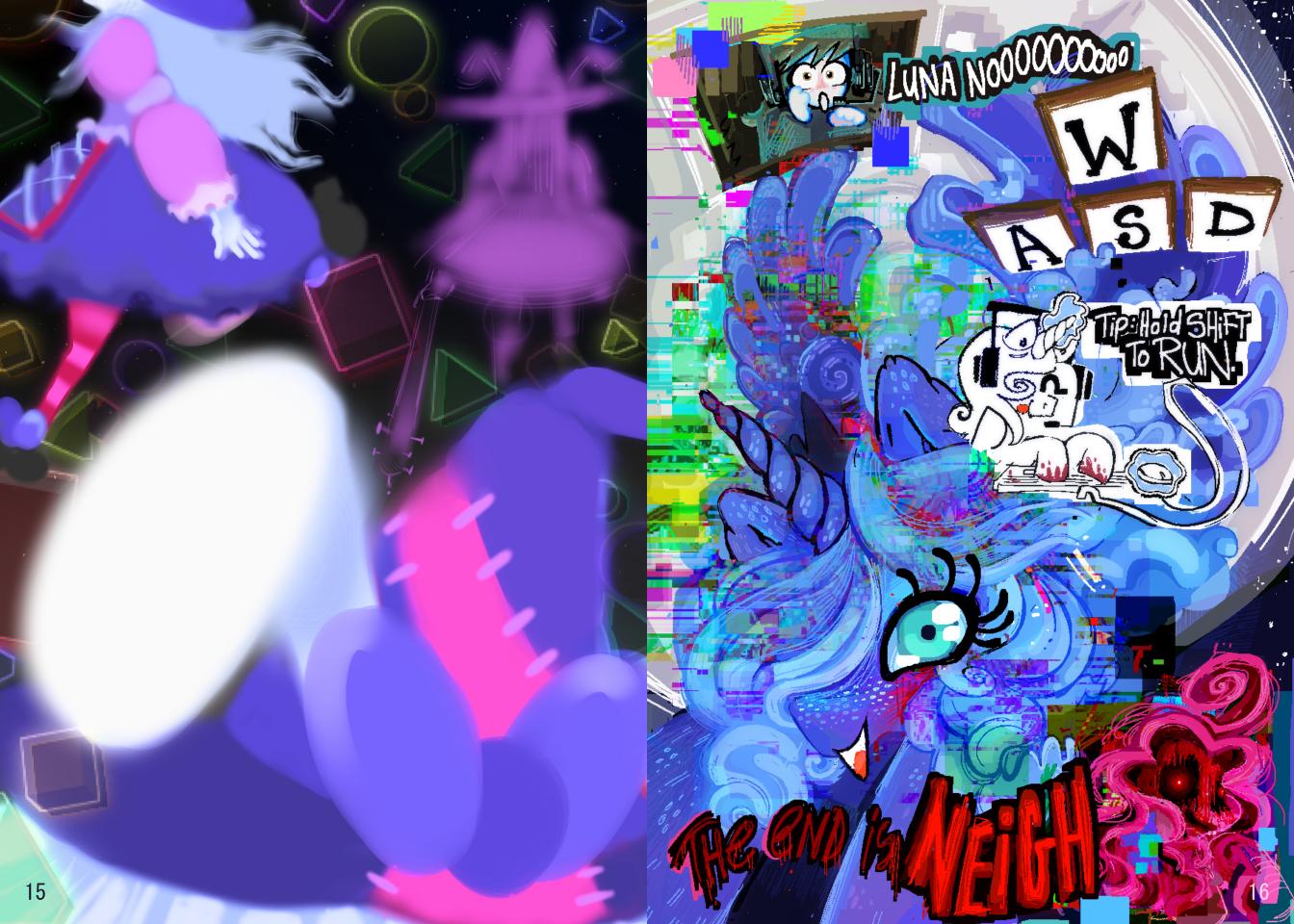




















# SUNLIGHT

## glownary / OMORI

Mari was always there to say good morning. Mari was always there to say goodnight. For all the time he spent as a shut-in, Sunny has never truly been alone. One year after moving away from Faraway Town, he learns how to be at peace with solitude. (Spoilers for full game)

"Good morning, Omori!"

With a gentle breeze blowing through his hair, Omori pauses to glance up at the purple sky. Is it morning? He can't tell—it must be, though, if Mari says it is. She rushes over to give him a hug without waiting for a response.

"Are you hungry? I have snacks," she says, turning to face the picnic blanket. While they were preoccupied, Kel has already made his way to the basket, a cookie in his hand and Aubrey hot on his trail.

"Hey! At least wait for Omori before you start eating!" Aubrey berates him. Kel quickly shoves the cookie into his mouth before she can stop him.

"He'fstakin too flong," he says, around a mouthful of crumbs. Basil watches them helplessly from his spot on the blanket, leaving Hero to be the one to hold Aubrey back.

"It's alright, Aubrey. Let him eat. But, Kel, you probably should slow down."

As Kel makes a show of chewing more slowly, Aubrey groans; "I just want to make sure that there's enough left for me and Omori before Kel goes and eats them all..."

"Don't worry," Basil says with a small smile, "Mari always packs enough."

It's true. Omori can't remember the last time they ran out of food at a picnic. Mari's picnic basket is eternally full; it must be deeper than it looks.

"There's enough for everyone," Mari affirms. "So let's dig in, okay?"

Omori gives a weak nod and joins the others on the blanket. As soon as Mari passes food out to everyone, the group conversation fractures into pairs. Aubrey and Kel immediately find something new to argue about. Mari teases Hero over something that Omori couldn't quite hear. Basil and Omori himself sit in amicable silence together. Despite the divide, the group feels wholly connected; knees bumping into elbows and feet tangled under each other's legs. After a long moment, Omori looks away from his friends and down at the cookie in his hands.

Made with Mari's love.

Being here, right now—eating Mari's cookies, his friends providing background noise and warmth—is exactly where Omori is supposed to be. He's certain of it.



If only Sunny could control his body's hunger, or the need to use the restroom, he would never need to leave his friends' sides. It's an unfortunate but necessary part of his day—or night, depending on what time he's forced to drag himself out of bed. Nights are quicker without his mother awake to try and make one-sided small talk. But... the freedom to rush comes at the price of fear.

A quick glance at Sunny's bedroom door reveals no light shining through the cracks between the door and the frame. Nighttime. The dull edges of dread creep in, and there's a sinking weight on his shoulders that he can't shrug off, but he ignores the feeling as he turns his bedroom lights on and presses onward into the dark second floor landing.

It's a good thing he isn't hungry. He really doesn't want to use the stairs.

Sunny turns the hall light on, then hurries to do the same in the bathroom. At least he manages to avoid looking at the mirror on the way in. After relieving himself, he goes to wash his hands. It's fine. The lights are on. On the way out, he's not so lucky; some odd urge possesses him to look back as he turns the light off again.

There's Something behind him in the mirror.

Of course, he knew there would be. There always is.

It's been long enough, now, that he doesn't react much to its presence. In the beginning he would scream in terror and curl up into a ball on the floor, waking his parents up each time. These days he can force himself to keep moving, blank-faced and mostly calm.

It's fine. He'll be with his friends soon enough. It's fine.

Sunny turns off each light on the way back to bed. He can feel the presence of Something behind him until he dives under the covers once more. The moment Sunny's back hits the mattress, Something spreads out over the corners of his room like a canopy. It envelops him, becomes a part of the atmosphere; it clings to his walls like Sunny clings to his dreams.

Something is present every single time he falls asleep. He can almost imagine it whispering in his ear, telling him goodnight. The thought isn't particularly comforting.

He imagines it anyway.



"I'm boooreddd. Don't you guys wanna do something?"

The others turn their attention to Kel at the sound of his complaint. Basil and Aubrey look at each other and shrug. Hero crosses his arms, while Mari tilts her head.

Mari speaks up first. "Hm... Like what, Kel?"

"Like, anything!" Kel hops to his feet, his fists raised in excitement. "We stick to the playground most days, but there's a whole world out there, y'know? Why not go exploring?"

"I guess we could," Hero says. "A change of pace might be fun. Where did you have in mind?"

"How about we check out that one crazy long ladder? I can't believe we've never tried to climb it before."

"We've never tried to climb it because Omori is scared of heights, dummy," Aubrey chimes in.

Kel scratches the back of his neck sheepishly. "Oh. Right. Then, what about the forest? Not the Vast Forest, the other one! We've never been there."

"Omori's afraid of spiders," Hero says, a bit too quickly.

Mari giggles and Hero's face turns red. "Mhm. Just Omori, and definitely not anyone else," she teases.

"Mm, uh." Kel takes a moment to think, clearly struggling to find anywhere else to go. "We could... go swimming and look for islands to visit?" The second the idea leaves his mouth, Kel looks defeated—he remembers why they can't.

Still, he waits for Basil's sigh; "Omori can't go in the water, he's scared of drowning."

The group falls silent. All eyes are on Omori. They've already explored every area that doesn't require Omori to conquer his fears

"Well, Omori, it's up to you," Mari says. His stomach turns. "If you decide to go exploring, your friends will have your back every step of the way. Is there anywhere new you'd like to go?"

There isn't. Or at least, there isn't anywhere that's worth it. Mari doesn't wait for an answer—she never does, because she never gets one. It doesn't matter. She can always understand what Omori wants, anyways.

"That's okay! We don't need to go somewhere new to have fun."

"Yeah! I know it was my idea, but there's lots of places we've been before that are just as cool," Kel says. "We could make sand sculptures on the beach! You wouldn't even have to go in the water."

"Or we could go to my house," Basil adds. "I have some new plants I'm growing that I want to show everyone soon."

"There are tons of super cute bunnies in the Vast Forest! We could go pet them together," Aubrey says.

"We can always stay right here in the playground, too. There's a lot of people we can hang out with," Hero says.

"We don't even need to leave this picnic blanket if you don't want to." Mari gives him a warm smile. "We'll always be by your side, one hundred percent. You don't have to worry. Alright, Omori?"



The date on his calendar can't be right. Crossing off each day with a dull, dried-out red marker is the only way for him to be certain of the time passing. He had crossed off the nineteenth, he should have processed what was coming, but... it's July twentieth.

"Sunny? Could you come down?" his mother calls from the foot of the stairs.

If he doesn't come down on his own, his mother will just come up to get him. Sunny slowly makes his way from his room and down the stairs to where his mother is waiting for him. She gives him a weak smile, the dark bags under her eyes betraying her.

As she leads him to the kitchen, a familiar silence fills the space between them. He takes a seat at the counter and stares blankly at the plate of steak and vegetables placed before him. His mother sits next to him, her plate filled with more of the same. They haven't said grace in years. Neither of them wait before digging in.

When they're both done, he watches as she puts their plates, forks, and knives in the sink. He knows what comes next.

"It's not much, because I wasn't sure what you wanted, but..." She gives him a small, sad smile as she pulls a brightly colored box out of the freezer. She places it on the counter and opens it up, then grabs two number-shaped candles from a drawer next to the sink and presses them into the top of the ice cream cake. "Happy birthday, Sunny."

The first candle is a one. The second candle is a six.

Sixteen? He can't be sixteen. He can't be, because Mari is his big sister, and Mari is fifteen.

Oblivious to his turmoil, his mother lights the candles and grabs a large kitchen knife. She hums the tune of the birthday song without actually singing it. "Make a wish," she tells him.

He blows out the candles. It's the same wish he makes every year—to go back to sleep. Asleep, where Mari is. Asleep, where he's twelve years old.

His mother cuts two slices of cake, one for each of them. His eyes never leave the kitchen knife.



Omori is in White Space. He's been living here for as long as he can remember.

Something is different today, though. Sunny takes a moment too long to fade away. Omori crouches over him, his bangs hanging down over Sunny's face. They stare into each other's eyes with matching blank expressions.

One of them is going to disappear permanently, soon. Omori isn't afraid of that. Sunny isn't, either.

Sunny does eventually fade away for now. Omori doesn't waste any time on White Space—with so little time left, he wants to spend it with his friends. He opens the door.

There's no one in Neighbor's Room.

He pushes onwards to the playground to find it similarly empty. All of his friends, gone without a trace. But the most concerning absence is Mari's. She never leaves her picnic blanket, or at least, never further than she needs to for a hug.

Omori stares at the still-full basket for a moment, then slowly turns to survey the playground; his eyes glaze over each abandoned piece of equipment before pausing to linger at the back of the floating mirror.

Logically, he should know what he'll find if he checks it. The knowledge doesn't stop him. Omori marches single-mindedly across the playground.

He's all alone. There's no one behind him in the mirror. Not Kel, not Aubrey, not Hero or Basil, and definitely not Mari.

Omori's face doesn't budge an inch.



It's Sunny's first night in the new house, after being released from the hospital that very same morning. The house is smaller—meant for two and not four. A few key pieces of furniture are already set up when he arrives. Other than that, the vast majority of their belongings remain in boxes scattered throughout each room.

The space is unfamiliar, but not any more or less welcoming than their last home. Blank white walls. Light brown floorboards. A sea of cardboard boxes.

No stairs. No tree.

"You're still recovering," his mother tells him. "Don't worry about unpacking. Get some rest."

Maybe she's right, but Sunny has done more than his fair share of resting in the past four years. He shakes his head and gets to work.

It hurts more than he expects it to. Each item he unpacks had been fine to see and to hold when he packed them in the first place. Now, his heart is an open wound, finally feeling everything he'd pushed down. A framed photo of himself and Mari is enough to break him down; tears start to trickle down his cheeks. His mother falls to her knees without a word and holds him close as he sobs. She continues to hold him until the tears stop flowing.

"I know," she says, wiping the tear stains from his cheeks. "I know."

It hurts, but Sunny stays to help unpack for the rest of the day. He made the decision to never run away again while he was in the hospital. He intends to honor that decision.

When they both finally turn in for the night, his room is completely bare save for the bed and two windows. With the lights off, sitting up in bed, he looks around and finds that it feels vast and desolate. The opposite wall seems to be a mile away, only to greet him with more nothingness.

She isn't here.

She no longer covers the space of his bedroom with her amorphous form, her hair draping down from the corners of the ceiling. This isn't her room anymore, not *their* shared room anymore. It belongs to Sunny, and Sunny alone.

"Goodnight," he whispers into the void.

No one answers.

He burrows under the covers and quickly falls into a dreamless sleep.



The weight on his shoulders has been gone for weeks. Despite that, he somehow still expects to see her in the mirror. There's nothing there; not any of his friends, and not even Something.

Sunny knows he really isn't that tall for his age. He feels too tall, anyways, staring at his reflection. He's seen this body in the mirror countless times but never truly processed it. Reality was an in-between state; it was a bridge he had to cross to get from one dream to the next. His body wasn't his body.

His body is his body, now, and it's strange. He's taller and thinner. His face is missing some baby fat. And, of course, he wears an eye patch.

On days where his mother leaves for work, or to handle errands, Sunny spends his time completely alone in the new house. The mirror reminds him of that fact each time he forgets it—Mari isn't here; not as herself, and not as Something.

Sunny has never felt this alone in years.

That's alright, though. He's made it through far worse.

Sunny crosses the circled day off on his calendar in bright red marker: August first. He rushes to the kitchen, not even sparing half a glance to the hall mirror on his way. His mother is already there making breakfast.

"Oh! You're up early," she says, turning the heat off on the stove. "It's nice to see you so excited."

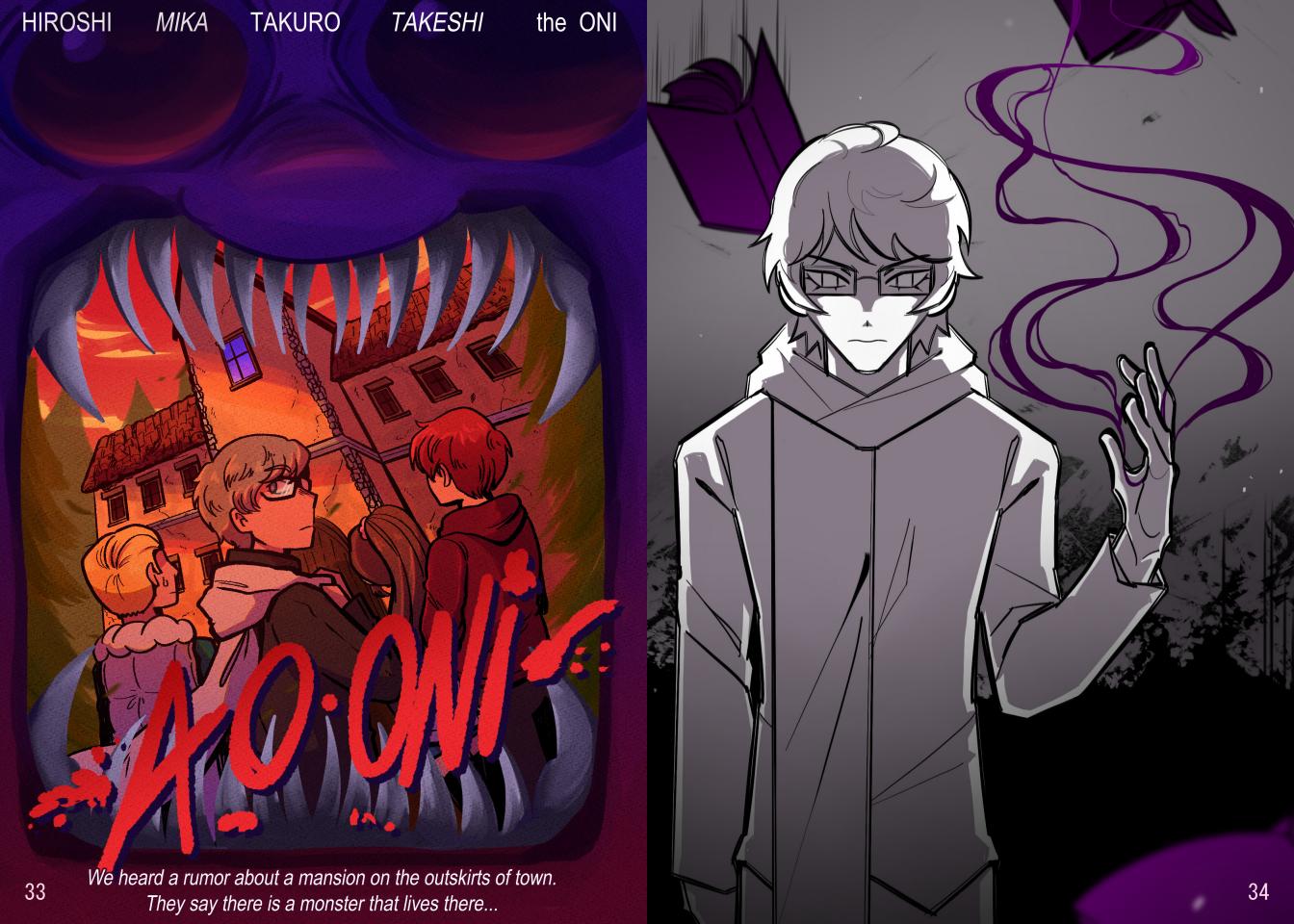
She serves two plates of sausage and eggs. The two of them still eat in silence, but it feels more comfortable these days. He looks at his mother and really sees her, now; she's got a few more wrinkles and smile lines, but the dark circles under her eyes are gone. She smiles at him and it no longer feels like she's holding back tears

When the doorbell rings, Sunny practically leaps out of his seat to make his way to the living room. He flings the door open wide. Sunlight streams in, warm against his face. The first thing he sees is Kel's brilliant grin. To Kel's left, Basil and Aubrey; to his right, Hero.

Sunny smiles softly. He can handle being alone, but he's always glad to see his friends.

"Morning, Sunny," Kel says. He doesn't wait for an answer before enveloping Sunny in a hug.

## end.















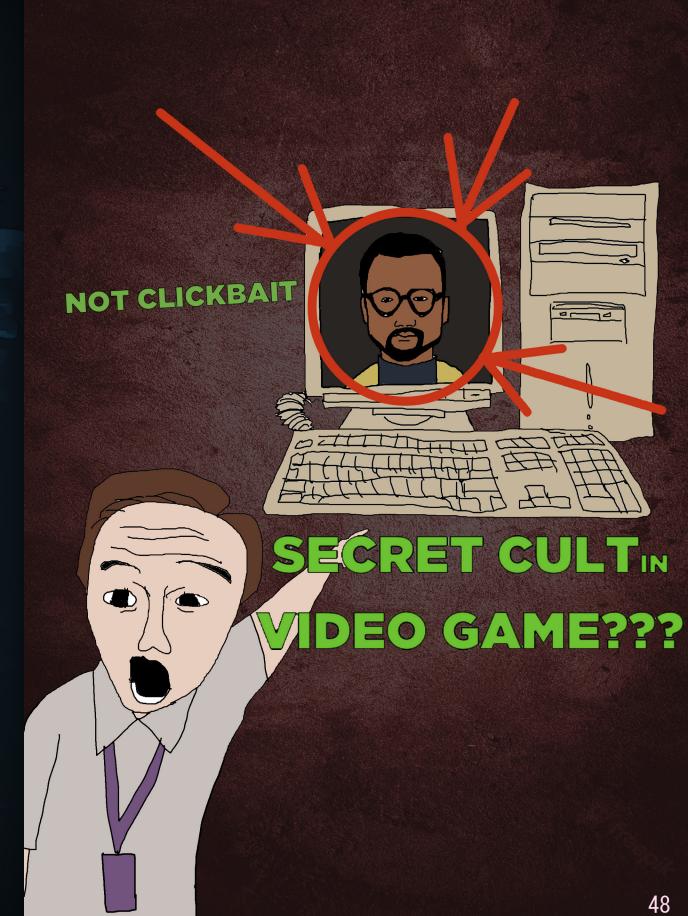
THIS WHALE'S A KULLER...





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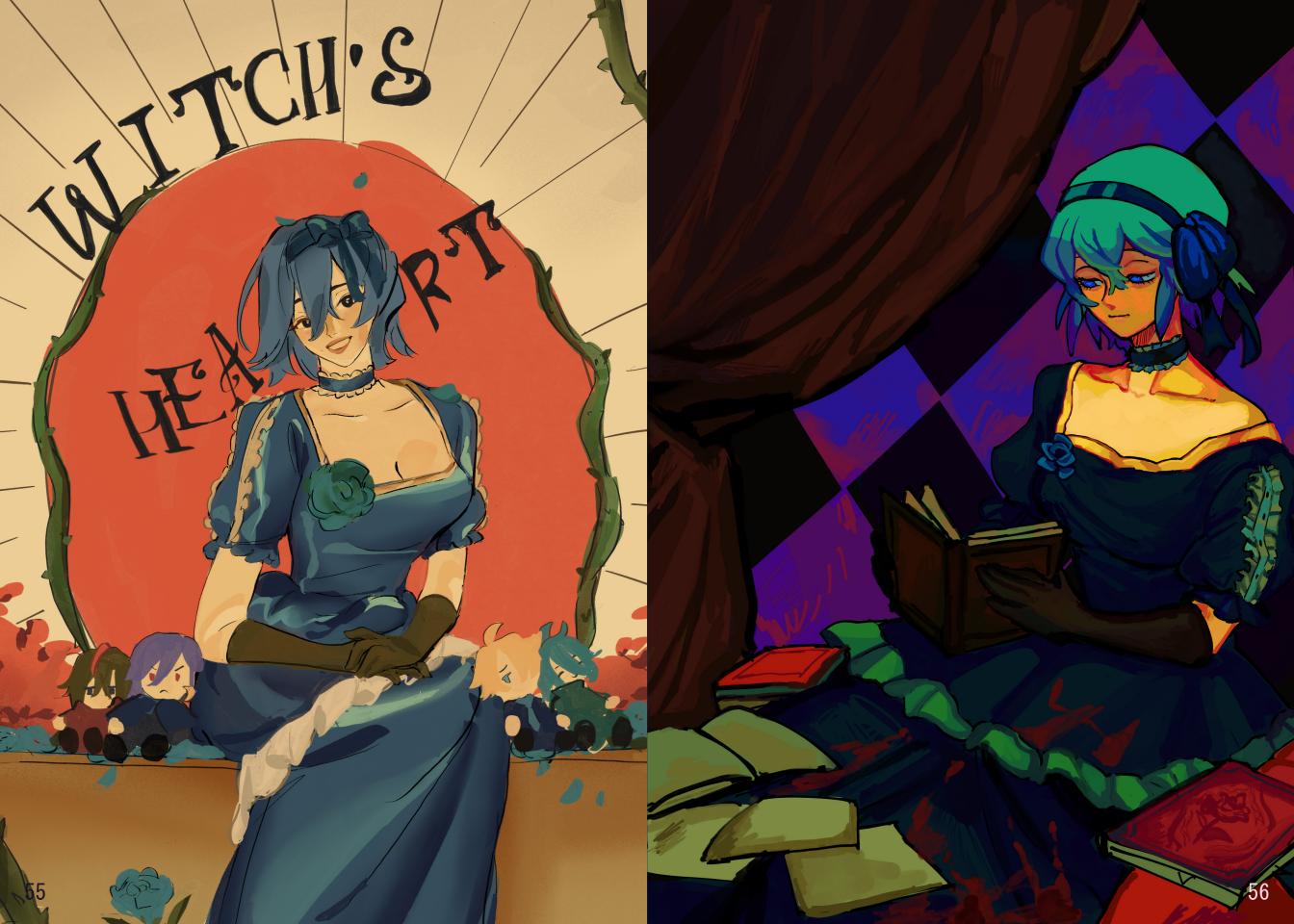
SWIMMING TO SHORE SOOK...

























## RETT

#### **ORYUUNGE / ZENO REMAKE**

Aka is on the right track towards escaping the ZENO research facility—all he has to do is somehow snap Kuro out of his trance and recover their lost memories in tandem. As he makes his way back to the bottommost floor in search of the final missing link, he catches sight of a once-locked door turned ajar. What happens when his curiosity gets the better of him—and for the worse?

(Mild, ambiguous spoilers for ZENO true ending, and TW for torture and suicide)

rang out in his ears as his scarlet eyes scanned through the documents in his hands. Bright lights flickered, a brief buzz occasionally emanating from them in the otherwise silent room. Bookshelves as tall as the ceiling above him covered most of the walls, and each one was brimming with books, reports, documents, and everything in between. As he continued to read, his eyes widened, as if he were engrossed in the climax of a fantastic novel. Every new piece of information he learned about the ZENO virus only reaffirmed his desire to leave this place—and the sooner, the better.

But was now the right time?

As that thought entered his mind, the young man caught sight of another document. This one appeared to be a piece ripped out of a personal journal of sorts, and the handwriting was mostly unintelligible. Regardless, he could make out some of it if he squinted his eyes and tilted his head ever so slightly. A second document was attached, small and held together by a paperclip. It seemed that returning to the bottommost floor of this facility would grant him the answers he sought. "But what about Maeno…" The young man muttered to himself.

That was right. Curing Maeno of his ZENO was far more important than unraveling the mysteries of this facility and their identities. And yet, despite knowing this to be true, the red-haired young man found himself unable to resist his curiosity. Perhaps the true secret to escaping this hell lies within uncovering every puzzle surrounding it. It was at that moment that he decided what he was going to do. And so, with a determined glimmer in his ruby eyes, and a furrow to his brows, Tsugino pressed on and left the room in which bookshelves hugged every wall.

The halls were silent, save for the creaking of the door as he shut it behind him. A very faint buzzing could be heard from the fluorescent lights that clung to the ceiling, and one would occasionally flicker. Despite the dull noise, however, the halls felt much too quiet for his liking. Tsugino swallowed the lump in his throat, and he took a shaky step towards the door that would lead into the main room of the first floor. His palms were sweaty, yet cold; they trembled as they caressed the cool metal doorknob, and he waited only a single heartbeat before he carefully turned it open.

It was quiet again—a deathly silence that threatened to choke him. Where did Maeno go? He wondered, heart racing fiercely. It was somehow more frightening to not know where his companion had gone. Tsugino almost wished he was being chased again; at least then he would know where Maeno was located. He let out a sigh, walking towards the stairs that would lead him to the lower floor. Right as he was about to enter the corridor, however, the loud, ear-numbing screech of a door sliding open echoed out in the otherwise stagnant room. Tsugino's ruby eyes widened and trembled as he slowly turned around. It was Maeno.

Maeno's absentminded and hollow eyes wandered around for a moment, and when he at last noticed Tsugino, a thin smile spread his lips wide. "There you are." He said, voice soft and quiet. If it were not for the blood smeared across his clothes and pale cheeks, one would not suspect him of ever being able to harm another. His eyes—so empty of life—narrowed, and his grin widened.

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"I' ve been searching everywhere for you, Tsugino." The words he uttered slurred slightly, a barely masked playfulness in his tone. "Hey, why don't you come this way?" Maeno took a step closer. "You said we'd escape together, right?" Another step. "I hope you weren't lying, Tsugino." He stopped, his expression losing all emotion. The thin smile he wore disappeared, replaced by a flat frown, barely twitching at the corner. "You know that I hate liars the most, right?"

It felt as if his feet were glued to the ground. Tsugino's entire body quivered in fear, and for a moment, it seemed as if his heart had forgotten to beat. He swallowed again, mouth feeling much too dry. If only he had grabbed a drink from the vending machine before heading down the stairs; no, if he had done that, then Maeno would have easily captured him. Without even thinking, he took a step back. "St-stay away…" Tsugino's voice trembled, barely above a whisper. "Stay away from me!" Before his brain could further process the situation, he turned on his heel and ran as fast as he could down the stairs.

Tsugino's heart raced violently in his chest, blood beating like a drum in his ears. His breathing was erratic, and he gasped for breath after each step he took. From behind him, he could hear the sound of Maeno following, his footsteps an out-of-rhythm tap, tap, tap that did not match his own. He did not dare look back, for if he did, he was terrified of what he would see. All Tsugino could do was run; run down the halls, run down the stairs, run down each corridor in hopes of escaping his friend. It wasn't until he had reached the fifth floor that he came to a steady stop.

The glowing green light from the sign on the wall flickered several times as his eyes darted around frantically. Which way should I go? Before he could second-guess himself, Tsugino headed straight into the room across the stairs. The dingy curtains that separated each office from the next would be the perfect cover for his hiding spot. He slipped behind one and hid underneath the desk, covering his mouth with both hands to muffle his loud breathing. Shutting his eyes tight, Tsugino listened carefully for footsteps, but he was only met with the sound of his own blood thrumming in his ears.

Several moments of silence passed, and with it, the calming of his heartbeat. It seemed that he had escaped Maeno.

Releasing a sigh of relief, he carefully crawled out of his hiding spot and looked around. The entirety of the fifth floor was quiet. Perhaps now was his chance to return to the very beginning and unearth the secrets that were being kept hidden from them. As that thought slipped into his mind, he could feel his hands begin to nervously shake. Did he really want to know the truth? What if the truth was something even more terrifying than ZENO-or more terrifying than being chased around by Maeno? His mouth quivered. Regardless, he knew in his heart that he needed to learn every secret about this facility-and, at the same time, himself. There were far too many missing pieces to this puzzle. Tsugino's brows knitted together, a serious and determined glimmer in his eyes. Standing up straight, he strode out of the room and down the hall, towards the very first room he and Maeno awoke inside.

The stench of blood and mildew clung to the walls as he traversed down the checkered path. Tsugino wrinkled his nose and frowned; the smell was unbearable. Though, it was not affecting him nearly as bad as when he had first walked down these halls with Maeno. The memory had him frowning deeper than before. No matter what the cost, he would find a way to help his friend and get them both out of here.

Just as Tsugino came face-to-face with the large, gated door that led into his destination, he stopped. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed something odd. Had Maeno not been so thorough in his investigations here before, he most likely would not have noticed the discrepancy. A door that had been previously locked was now ajar. Tsugino's brow lifted. He remembered quite vividly the both of them pulling at the metal knob in hopes of opening it, and it had not budged even once. Who opened it-and when? "Well…" He sighed and scratched the back of his head, ruffling his reddish hair. "I suppose a quick peek ain' t gonna hurt." Perhaps there were important clues in this room as well. Steeling himself and swallowing nervously, Tsugino pushed open the door and quietly stepped inside.

/3

The contents of this room was something out of a horror movie. Blood was smeared and splattered across the walls and floor, and strange devices made up of chains and shackles clung to the walls, hanging from the ceiling. The room was dark, with the only light emanating from it bathing everything in a deep, saturated red. Tsugino's eyes squinted from the strain, and the stench of rotten flesh and iron nearly made him throw up. His hand instinctively rose up to cover his nose and mouth, stomach already churning from how horrid the odor was. "What the hell is this place?" Once again, it felt as if the fear had taken over his body, promptly gluing him in place. That fear only intensified when the door he had just walked through suddenly creaked open once again.

"Oh... So this is where you' ve been?" The voice was unmistakable. Tsugino swallowed and turned around, his eyes meeting Maeno's. They were still dark and void of emotion. His appearance was doll-like, with his expression just as hollow and artificial as before.

"M-Maeno…" Tsugino took several steps back, and his friend matched each one. He swallowed, feet nearly slipping on the puddles of blood that dirtied the floor.

Maeno was seemingly unbothered by his friend's fear. "Tsugino... If you stay in such a dangerous room, then you will surely get yourself hurt." His smile was eerie, eyes closing as he took another step forward. He held out his hand, the broken handcuff that clung to his wrist jingling quietly. "Why don't you come over here, hm, Tsugino?" Each word he spoke was soft and gentle, a slight drawl in his voice.

Tsugino reacted almost immediately; he slapped away Maeno's hand and took several more steps backwards. "No!" He shouted, "D-don't come near me!"

The room was quiet. Maeno stood there, the smile on his face slowly dissipating into a deep, dark frown. There was no feigned kindness in his expression any longer. His hand slowly dropped down to dangle at his side, the cuff once again chiming quietly.

"Tsugino…" His voice was barely above a whisper, a slight tremble clinging to his words. "Are you rejecting me? Tsugino?" Another several steps were taken towards his friend, who was quick to back up once again. The two continued to move up until Tsugino's back was pressed against the cold, blood-stained, cement wall. "Don't you remember? 'Let's get out of here together!' That's what you said." Maeno's expression went grim. His hands balled up into tight fists, arms trembling from the strain.

M-Maeno…" For a moment, only silence hung in the air. Tsugino felt guilty. It was true that he had said that, and he had wholeheartedly meant it, but Maeno was acting strangely now. He was scared. Being alone with him, in a room filled with bloodstained devices, soaked red in all four corners, had him fearing the absolute worst.

After several heartbeats passed, Maeno at last spoke up again. "You···lied to me···" His voice was cold and matter-of-fact. It was clear at this point that there would be no reasoning with him. Despite this unequivocal fact, Tsugino knew that he still had to try. He opened his mouth to speak, and his words wavered.

"M-Maeno, calm down! I-"

"You lied to me." The words were repeated, cutting Tsugino off instantly. Once again it became quite clear that arguing with Maeno would be a fruitless effort. But this was his life he feared for, and so he would try again regardless.

Tsugino swallowed nervously and spoke up again, but it was painfully obvious by the tone in his voice that he was scared. "Stop…" He said, his body trembling. "Stop this. Why… Why are you doing this, Maeno?"

Maeno said nothing and swiftly got to work. Tsugino's hands were grabbed and placed into the cuffs of one of the devices that hung from the ceiling. Once it was locked into place, he did the same to his ankles. The red-haired young man was paralyzed by fear, unable to move or struggle as he was confined to this strange device.

"Maeno!" Tsugino shouted his friend's name once again.

"Wh-what are you doing? Let me go!" His wrists weakly tugged at the chains, the sound of the metal clinking together echoing out in the room.

"I just..." Maeno spoke up, voice soft. There was a small, childlike smile on his face. "I just wanted to try it." He laughed softly, stepping around Tsugino to grab the devices' lever. "For how long can a person be stretched... until he dies?" The innocent smile on his face widened, contorting into a maniacal grin filled with malice. He then began to pull.

The chains lifted, higher and higher, yanking on Tsugino's arms and stretching them towards the ceiling. "Did you know about this sort of execution method, Tsugino?" Maeno inquired, his voice so soft that it was a soothing contrast to the torture his friend was enduring. "It's been used all over the world, for a long, long time." *Stretch*. "They would tie a person's limbs with rope, and attach them to horses." Stretch. "And pull them apart in a single breath." Maeno laughed loudly. "I'm so happy for you, Tsugino." He said, eyes narrowing. "You can finally grow taller!"

Tsugino screamed loudly as the chains pulled at his limbs so hard that the joints in his arms began to stretch. He wriggled against the wall, tugging at the bindings keeping him still, voice going raw as the pain overtook his senses. "It hurts!" He shrieked, "Stop this, Maeno! Stop! Please!" Each of his cries fell upon deaf ears, however, and Maeno simply smiled at his friend as he continued to pull at the device, stretching his limbs. A cacophony of joints popping out of place and excruciating screams mingled together in the small room soaked in blood. Tears started to stream down Tsugino's face as the unbearable pain soon became all he could think about. "I-I… don't want… to die…"

It was strange. There was something familiar about this scenario. As he waded closer to unconsciousness, and his vision became blurry, Tsugino couldn't help but realize this fact. His vision slowly began to fade, and for a moment, a girl suddenly appeared in his mind. A memory.

That was right; he had never regained all of his memories. Who was she? What was her name? There were so many things he wanted to find the answers to. Would it all end, just like this? Just as Tsugino wondered this, a loud snapping sound echoed out in the room, and everything went silent.

Maeno laughed maniacally, continuing to pull at the chains even as his friend's body was split into two. "Isn't this great, Tsugino?" He cheered, "You're so tall now! You can reach the ceiling!" He laughed again, pulling at the chains and releasing them, repeating the action over and over again. A dull thumping sound emanated from the room as Tsugino's severed torso hit the ceiling in an erratic rhythm, along with the jingling of chains being pulled continuously.

This madness continued on for over an hour before Maeno realized what he had done and broke down completely. The desolation took over his mind, driving him further into insanity before he took his own life.

"A pity." A soft voice spoke, watching the scene unfold until the bitter end through a retro, static television. The room was pitch black, save for the glowing red emanating from the screen. "This one is no good, too." Her long blue hair was braided down her back, two shorter tufts gently framing her pale face. Her eyes watched the screen closely, a blood red that matched the room Tsugino met his end in. "The next one…" Her voice trembled. How long did she have to endure this hell? For how much longer did she have to watch the person she loved meet his end, over and over again? "Surely the next one will be the last."

She clutched a knife tightly in her small hands, which trembled from the effort of her grip. All she could do was hope that this would be the last time. The uncertainty of how much longer she would last in this void burdened her mind heavily, but as long as he didn't forget her-no matter how many times it took-she was certain she would still remain here. "Please don't forget me, Aki. Brother…" With those words so shakily and quietly uttered, she pressed the knife deep into her flesh.

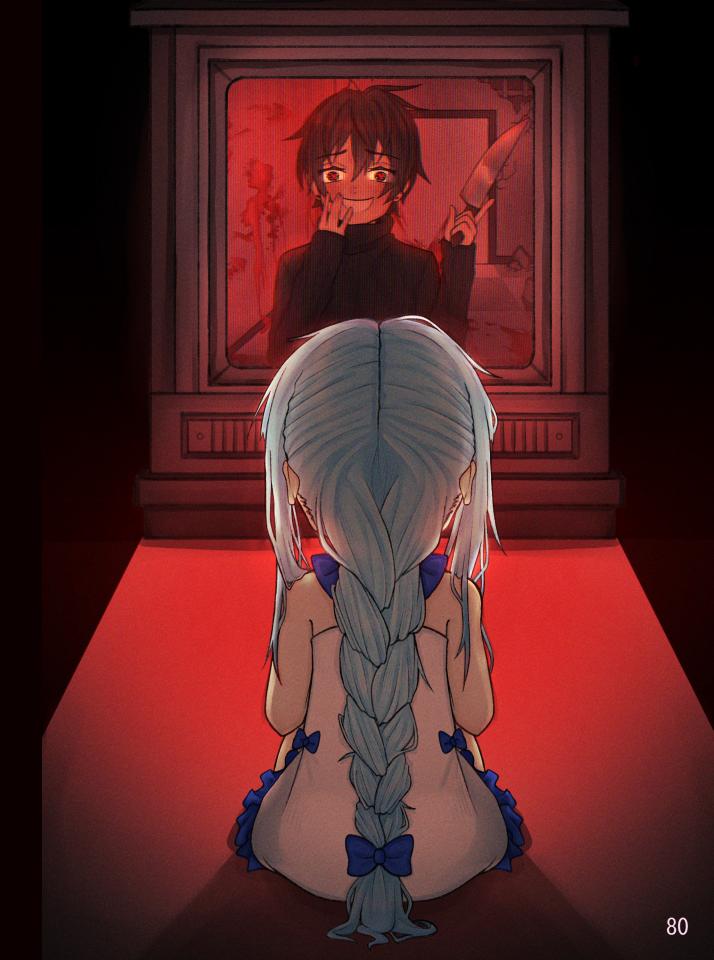
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Everything went dark. There was no sound, no warmth, no signs of life. A young man's nose twitched as he stirred from his slumber, his red hair tickling his peacefully sleeping face. "Do your best, Aki." A soft, childlike voice echoed out in his dreams, so quiet it could scarcely be heard.

The young man stirred before finally waking. He sat up, lifting his hand to rub at his exhausted eyes. "Where… am I?" Blinking away the blurriness, he looked around the small room he was contained inside. Aside from the person sleeping on the floor beside him, not another soul occupied the room. So who had that voice belonged to? He frowned, deciding it must have been a dream, and stood up. Realizing the other person wasn't waking yet, he kicked him with his foot. "Hey! How long do ya plan on sleepin'?!"

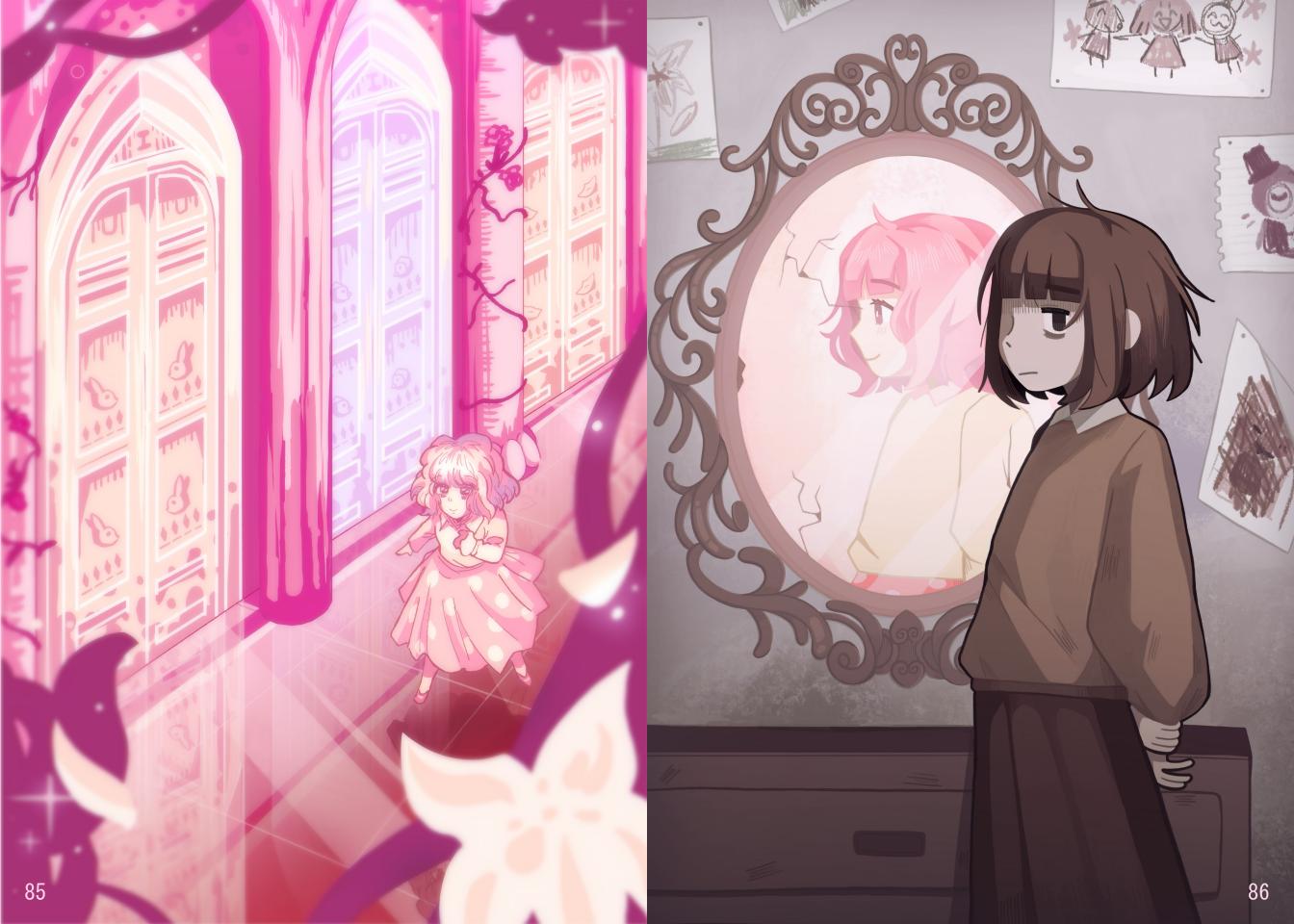
The cogs began to turn yet again. "This time." The young girl once more watched with dwindling hope in her heart through the dingy television screen. "This time will surely be the last."

END.





















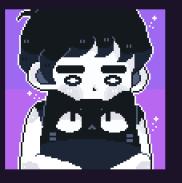




























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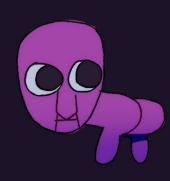






















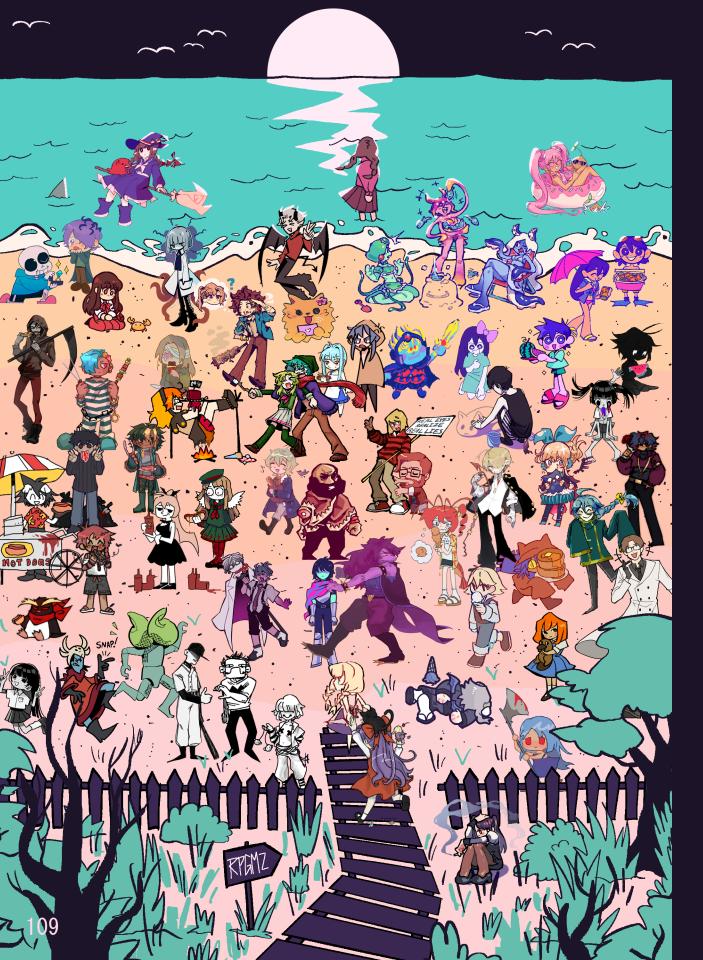












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### THANK YOU!

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